



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SD LAUNCHES COMPREHENSIVE SUICIDE PREVENTION PLAN

The South Dakota Department of Health has launched South Dakota's first, [comprehensive plan](#) since 2013 to reduce suicide deaths. Over the past decade, South Dakota's suicide rates rose by nearly 40 percent. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people ages 15-34.

"We know all too well that South Dakota is not immune from the devastation brought about by suicide," said Governor Kristi Noem. "Last year, I asked the Department of Health to lead a joint effort to develop a statewide suicide prevention plan, and I'm proud of the product they have developed. This plan addresses many aspects of suicide and includes strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Every person has value, and help is available."

South Dakota's comprehensive plan focuses on helping people recognize the signs and symptoms of suicide, empowers communities with data and resources, and raises public awareness of the issue.

Suicide is rarely caused by any single factor. According to a recent Vital Signs report from the Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC), more than half of people who die by suicide are not known to have a diagnosed mental health condition at the time of death. Other problems often contribute to suicide, such as those related to relationships, substance use, physical health and job, money, legal or housing stress.

South Dakota has resources available to help individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts and support for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. If you need help call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Services are available 24/7. You can also contact any medical provider such as a family physician, psychiatrist or hospital emergency room, as well as a Community Mental Health Center or tribal mental health provider. Additional information, resources, and support are available at [sdsuicideprevention.org](https://sdsuicideprevention.org).

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

VA Faith Initiative.....	2
SRST DVA Team .....	3
VA Chemotherapy App .....	4
Legacy Appeals .....	5
Veteran Hiring Event.....	6
Lake County Open House.....	7
Upcoming Events.....	8

NATIONAL  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION  
LIFELINE 8255  
1 (800) 273 TALK

**SDSP**  
SOUTH DAKOTA  
SUICIDE PREVENTION

# VA ANNOUNCES PROPOSED RULE REGARDING EQUAL TREATMENT OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) proposed a rule, Jan. 16, that would implement President Trump's, May 3, 2018, Executive Order (EO) establishing a [White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative](#), to remove regulatory barriers allowing religious and non-religious organizations equal treatment in VA-supported social service programs.

The proposed rule ensures VA-supported social service programs are implemented in a manner consistent with the Constitution and other applicable federal law.

Under current regulations governing these programs, religious providers of social services — but not other providers of social services — must make referrals under certain circumstances and must post notices regarding this referral procedure. The VA's proposed rule would eliminate religious providers from this requirement.

The current hinderances were not required by any applicable law, and because they were imposed only on religious social service providers, they are in tension with recent Supreme Court precedent regarding nondiscrimination against religious organizations. The proposed rule will foreclose other unequal treatment of religious organizations by ensuring they are not required to provide assurances or notices that are not required of secular organizations.

By compelling religious organizations, but not secular organizations, to post special notices and make referrals, the alternative-provider requirements unequally placed impediments on religious organizations and cast unwarranted suspicion on them.

Additionally, the proposed rule will clarify that religious organizations may apply for awards on the same basis as any other organization and that when the VA selects award recipients, the VA will not discriminate based on an organization's religious character. The proposed rule further clarifies that religious organizations participating in VA-supported social service programs retain their independence from the government and may continue to carry out their missions consistent with religious freedom protections in federal law, under the First Amendment.

The proposed rule incorporates the Attorney General's 2017 Memorandum for All Executive Departments and Agencies, Federal Law Protections for Religious Liberty. That memorandum was issued pursuant to President Trump's, May 4, 2017, Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty, which guides all federal administrative agencies and executive departments in complying with federal law.

"Protecting religious liberty is a key part of ensuring veterans, families and potential partners — no matter their religious beliefs — feel welcome to work with and seek services from the VA," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "These important changes will help us accomplish these important goals."

# TWO MARINES JOIN THE SRST DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TEAM

Bernice Good House is participating in the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Department of Veterans Affairs Compensated Work Therapy Program and will serve as a veterans service officer trainee.

Bernice joined the United States Marine Corps in December 2002 and served until June 2006 where she attained the rank of Corporal.

Cpl. Good House served with the CLR 17, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Logistics Group, Camp Pendleton, CA she also served in Fallujah and Al Asad, Iraq as a food service specialist.

"This program is going to help me get back into the work force, maintaining a job, working with others, and being able to interact with other veterans," said Good House.

Isiah Buckley, is the new cemetery manager for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's All Nations Veterans Cemetery.

Isiah joined the United States Marine Corps in July 2009 and served until November 2016 where he attained the rank of Sergeant (E5).

Sgt. Buckley's first tour of duty was as a 5711 CBRN Defense Specialist. He re-enlisted as a Marine Guard in the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group serving in Kabul, Afghanistan, Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Lagos, Nigeria.



"Being a cemetery manager at Standing Rock Sioux Tribe offers me the opportunity to serve the community that has helped shape my life," said Buckley. "I've always planned on returning to Standing Rock and making a positive impact, and this role provides me the opportunity to do so. I have the unique opportunity of setting up the All Nations Veteran Cemetery to be a space that the community can have pride in, a space where people will know their loved ones will be honored. Being the cemetery manager means I have been entrusted to give a resting place for those who have served our country and ensure they are properly given the resting place they deserve for their service."

# APP HELPS VETERANS MANAGE CHEMOTHERAPY SYMPTOMS

Veterans with cancer who undergo aggressive therapies often endure adverse effects. The worst symptoms usually happen at home following chemotherapy or other treatment.

As a result, a team at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center in Minnesota enlisted the help of [Annie – VA’s automated text messaging system](#). The intent is to provide these veterans with increased support for symptom management.

“Patients know they are experiencing symptoms, but they don’t always know when it’s too much or how to react,” explains Connie Jaenicke, NP. Jaenicke is a nurse navigator in the Minneapolis hematology/oncology department.

“We worry about patients not seeking treatment for these symptoms early enough to avoid a hospitalization. As a result, this can worsen a patient’s quality of life unnecessarily and delay or preclude future chemotherapy.”

Two years ago, Minneapolis became one of the first VA locations to participate in a pilot program to test Annie. Around the same time, scientists published studies citing evidence that online self-management tools reduced cancer symptom distress and improved quality of life.

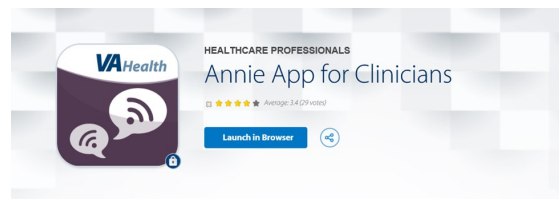
As the idea formed that Annie could be used similarly, a clinical team from the oncology department convened.

Finally, the group and members of the Annie Connected Care team developed the protocol and recruited 15 veterans to participate in an eight-month study.

The report was published in the [August 2019 Supplemental Edition of Federal Practitioner](#). It is titled, “[Use of Mobile Messaging System for Self-Management of Chemotherapy Symptoms in Patients with Advanced Cancer](#).”

Annie sent veterans text messages twice daily, Monday through Friday, asking them to rate a symptom using the following severity scale:

- Absent (0)
- Mild (1)
- Moderate (2)
- Severe (3)
- Disabling (4)



When veterans replied to a symptom inquiry, Annie sent an automated message response based on the severity scale:

- Offer positive affirmation that they were doing well (0)
- Give advice for home management (1)
- Refer them to an educational hyperlink (2)
- Ask them to call a direct number to the clinic (3)
- Instruct them to report directly to the emergency department (4)

(continued on next page)

## **ANNIE APP (CONTINUED)**

None of the veterans reported disabling symptoms. In addition, all replied with symptom ratings and received self-management guidance. In a follow-up participant survey, veterans offered many positive responses. Equally important, none reported technology challenges. All said it was easy to do, and many felt empowered by the texted advice for symptom self-management.

“The most unanticipated response was how many veterans said they felt validated when Annie said they were doing well,” Jaenicke says. “That’s a tribute to the messages Lara and Dan helped us craft, like ‘Good job’ and ‘Happy to hear you’re not experiencing nausea.’”

As a result, Annie is available for use at VA facilities nationwide. Developers have tested and approved a wide range of Annie message protocols to help veterans with self-care. Along with an updated version of the oncology protocol, there are protocols for blood glucose monitoring, hypertension, medication reminders, weight management, anxiety and many others.

Carson also helped develop other Annie protocols. She explains, “As we move toward using technology more often, our hope is that it becomes just as important as prescribing a walker or medicine to help the patient at home.”

## **VA MAKES PROGRESS ON RESOLUTION OF LEGACY APPEALS**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Appeals Management Office (AMO) significantly reduced disability compensation legacy appeals inventory during the last nine months as part of the department’s long-term legacy resolution plan.

This inventory includes Notices of Disagreement (NOD) and substantive appeals filed in the “legacy” system – the appeals process in place prior to implementation of the [Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 \(AMA\)](#). VBA lowered this inventory from a high of 292,452 in March 2016, to 96,350 on Dec. 31, 2019, despite receiving 770,571 new NOD and substantive appeals during that period.

“Veterans who have been waiting for their decisions can trust that the VA is working towards getting them the benefits and services they deserve,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Completing legacy Notices of Disagreement and substantive appeals will be an important step in meeting this obligation.”

VBA is on track to eliminate its NOD and substantive appeals inventory by July 4.

Information on the VA appeals process can be found at <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp>





# BLACK HILLS National Forest



*"Caring for the land and serving people"*

## VETERAN'S HIRING EVENT FEBRUARY 11, 2020

Mystic Ranger District Office  
8221 Mount Rushmore Road  
Rapid City, SD  
(605) 343-1567

TWO Hiring  
Sessions:  
1500 - 1700  
1800 - 2000

The Black Hills National Forest is reaching out to the local veteran community to hire a number of positions, including 14 permanent GS 4-9 Motorized Trail Rangers & Motorized Trail Maintenance positions, a GS 5/7/9 Civil Engineer & GS 5/6/7 Timber Resource Assistants.

- Please bring your DD 214 & copies of your resume
- Opportunity for one on one discussion and interviews with hiring managers.
- This is not a direct hiring event. Qualified candidates will be contacted in the coming weeks with tentative job offers.

For more information, visit [www.fs.usda.gov/blackhills](http://www.fs.usda.gov/blackhills)



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Lake County Veterans Service Office

# OPEN HOUSE

**SHOWCASING VA  
TELEHEALTH EQUIPMENT**

With Representatives From:

- Lake County Veterans Service Office
- South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs
- Sioux Falls VAMC
- Sioux Falls Vet Center

**COME LEARN:**

- THE BENEFITS OF TELEHEALTH**
- HOW TO USE TELEHEALTH AT HOME**
- HOW TO MAKE TELEHEALTH APPOINTMENTS AT THE COURTHOUSE**

4th Floor, Lake County Courthouse

**Thursday, January 30th**

**4pm-7pm**

Bars provided by  
VFW Post #2638 Auxiliary

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 25—Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Veterans Hearing—Wakpala Public School Auditorium—9:00 am (CT)  
Jan 27—VFW State Legislative Mixer—Moose Lodge—Fort Pierre—6:00—8:30 pm (CT)  
Jan 30—Lake County VSO Open House—Lake County Court House (200 E. Center Street)—4:00—7:00 pm (CT)  
Feb 5—SFVAHCS Art Show—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center Chapel—3rd Floor—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
Feb 10—State American Legion Legislative Reception—AL Post 8—Pierre—5:30—8:00 pm (CT)  
Feb 11—USDA BHNH Veterans Hiring Event—Mystic Ranger District Office (8221 Mt. Rushmore Road) Rapid City—3:00—5:00 pm (MT) and 8:00—10:00 pm (MT)  
Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—Oacoma  
Mar 4—VABHHCS Art Show—Fort Meade VA Campus—Building 145 Classroom 109—1:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 6—Drop-In Legal Service for Veterans—DAV Sioux Falls Chapter—1519 W. 51st Street—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
Mar 11—VABHHCS Art Show—Hot Springs VA Campus—Building 1 Rotunda—1:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Mar 25—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown  
May 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
May 12—8th Annual WWII Veterans Luncheon—TREA Building—Rapid City—11:00 am (MT)  
May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings  
May 30—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7  
June 3-7—VFW State Convention—Aberdeen  
Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron  
Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre  
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair  
Sep 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8 (Tentative)  
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Oct 11—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 (Tentative)  
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer  
South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>  
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
E-mail address: [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)

